

## Some West Country Migrants in 1975

By Major General C. G. LIPSCOMB\*

In spite of a glorious summer the commonest migrants, with the exception of *P. gamma* which swarmed everywhere, seem to have been disappointingly scarce.

I had news of a single *V. atalanta* towards the end of April, when it was seen in a friend's garden, but then there was a big gap and it was not until August that singletons began to appear on the buddleias. They remained scarce for the rest of the autumn but I did find a few larvae in my garden in October which produced butterflies in November.

*V. cardui* has been equally thin on the ground and at no stage did the numbers build up either from fresh migrants or from the progeny of earlier arrivals.

On 15th August I noticed several *M. stellatarum* hovering over flowers on a hillside near Mere more normally associated with *L. coridon*—an unexpected place to find them—one, which didn't look normal, was captured and proved to have the orange of the hindwings replaced by dirty white. Unfortunately it was worn and so was not kept.

There were reports of sightings of odd *C. croceus* in Wiltshire towards the end of August and on 9th September I saw a fine fresh *ab helice* flying over downland near Salisbury but they too remained scarce and only two were seen in the latter part of September during a visit to S. Devon. However, two friends who were touring in S. Ireland during the last fortnight of August, reported independently seeing a number of the butterflies, an indication of the direction their main migration had taken.

On the morning of 21st September, my wife and I were at Start Point in S. Devon. There was a stiff westerly breeze blowing but in spite of this large numbers of *P. rapae* were coming in off the sea on a wide front. One big patch of a low growing hawkweed on the top of the cliffs was smothered in the butterflies with others waiting to take their turn on any unoccupied flower heads. I noticed too that pairing was taking place on this feeding ground, a pointer that copulation takes place after, not before, migration. By the afternoon most of the butterflies had dispersed inland.

On 30th September I found a female *H. convolvuli* at rest in a glass porch at the back of my house. I carried the lady out into the garden resting on one of my fingers and placed her on a suitable tree trunk where she at once settled down.

As the light began to go I visited her and found she was up on her legs and with her wings vibrating strongly. She reminded me of one of our wartime bombers warming up its engines prior to take-off. Suddenly she was airborne and zoomed away into the night.

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